

THINK magazine – April 2007

Faith & Finance

Jim Palmer

Voted Best Picture in '38;  
Great Reminder for Today

What does the title of a Hollywood movie voted “Best Picture” in the 1930’s have to do with Faith and Finances in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? It serves as fitting reminder for how the Christian should view Money and its friends. In a world which promotes money as a god (maybe even as “The” god): comforting, empowering, fulfilling, and esteem boosting – it is helpful to be reminded of the truth about wealth. For all the good it can do, money should never be elevated to the status of a god. The movie voted best picture in 1938 (which I recommend for viewing) reminds us of its weaknesses.

### **You Can’t Take it with You**

Though John D. Rockefeller was one of the wealthiest men of his day and a noted philanthropist, he died and was buried just like anyone else. Randy Alcorn, in his excellent book on stewardship, *The Treasure Principle*, tells the story that there was much interest about Rockefeller’s will and estate. A reporter inquired of his accountant, “how much did John D. leave?” The reply was simple.

“He left... all of it.”

How much did Andrew Carnegie, Howard Hughes, and William Randolph Hearst leave? How much will Donald Trump, Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, and you and I leave? ALL of it.

Oh, but you say, “I am not rich.” Wrong. Every American reading these words is, in fact, rich. And while you may not realize that you are it does not change the fact that you are. It’s time for us to open our eyes to the Truth. **We have been blessed in abundance.** And whether we *feel* rich or *think* we are rich when we compare ourselves with the latest Forbes list is immaterial. If I haven’t convinced you of this fact, it doesn’t matter – what you do have... you can’t take it with you.

Despite our knowledge of this fact, we all too often behave as if it were only theory. The Bible makes it clear that there is no escaping the end result of our earthly lives.

“...when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; ...when he dies he shall carry nothing away. His glory shall not descend after him.” (Psalm 49:16-17)

“But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ ” (Luke 12:20)

“As he came from his mother’s womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; and he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry in his hand.”  
(Ecclesiastes 5:15)

If your purpose and plan is to work, spend, save, invest, and accumulate until you retire (or die) your plan is “holey” – that’s right, full of holes. All of your effort is in vain. Call it the “Rich Fool Plan” (Luke 12:15-21). “*So is he* who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” Are you living your life like the “he” mentioned in Luke 12:21? This short life, be it 50, 70, 90, or even 110 years, is vanity if it is spent accumulating treasure that is worthless in the “new heaven and new earth.” Colonel Sanders got it right when he said, “There’s no need being the richest man in the cemetery. You can’t do any business from there.”

We must re-think our concept of money, wealth, and materialism. The world’s mold into which we are constantly squeezed teaches us to value short-term pleasure over long term gain. Society today would have us scoff at Moses as foolish for having given up Egypt’s treasures (Hebrews 11:23-27). It would have us ridicule Abram for not “looking out for number one” when he let Lot choose his land first (Genesis 13). And it would suggest we question Paul’s sanity for forsaking his pedigree in favor of Christ (Philippians 3:4-11).

Shouldn’t we must be busily wearying and worrying ourselves over protecting *our* “piece of the pie?” It is true that we have been given so much. And we must exercise good, faithful stewardship over what we have been given. Some have seen their business flourish and as a result they are counted among the world’s most prosperous (living in America, this part is easy). But, what are we doing with our increase – our abundance – that is, the amount above and beyond that which sustains our needs and those of our families? Will it perish with us when we die? Will we pass it on to our children and potentially harm them in doing so? Will we leave it to good causes through means of a will? Will we die with “God’s money in our bank accounts?”

Conventional wisdom dictates that we follow the proper legal methods to establish a distribution plan for our estate in the event of our death. In other words, having a will is good and proper. And, due to the uncertainty surrounding the exact date of our departure, leaving monies to the Church and good works is certainly appropriate. However, it is what we do with what God has entrusted us while we are living that requires the greatest discipline, wisdom, and godly encouragement. Because, you can’t take it with you.

So what are we to do?

Begin by thinking on these things. In the aforementioned book, the *The Treasure Principle*, Alcorn defines the term thusly:

“You can’t take it with you – but you can send it on ahead.”

Is this a biblical concept?

Consider the following passages, apply reasoning, and I believe you will conclude, as I did, that it is indeed biblical. First, in Philippians 4:17 Paul writes concerning the Philippians' generosity, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that *increases to your credit*" (ESV). Or, "...I seek the profit that accrues *to your account.*" Next, consider Paul's Spirit-led instructions to those who are rich that they not "trust in uncertain riches but in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, ready to share, *storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come*, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:17-19). And finally, recall Jesus' words in Matthew 6:19-21, which read, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; *but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven*, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

When it comes to stocks, we invest in companies in which we are interested or think will provide a high return or because a friend we trust is starting a business with a plan in which we believe. Are you willing to "buy into" the concept of Christ and the work of His church? Would you be interested in "investing" in significant and guaranteed returns that will never diminish in value and support a cause that has eternal benefits to yourself and others? You can invest in heavenly treasure today by the manner in which you spend or give the money you have.

A.W. Tozer put it this way:

"As base a thing as money often is, it yet can be transmuted into everlasting treasure. It can be converted into food for the hungry and clothing for the poor; it can keep a missionary actively winning lost men to the light of the gospel and thus transmute itself into heavenly values. Any temporal possession can be turned into everlasting wealth. Whatever is given to Christ is immediately touched with immortality."

The choice is yours and mine and it is for today. What we do with our finances holds implications for both now and eternity. The here and now choice is will we use the blessings we receive from God (Deuteronomy 8:18) to serve His purposes by contributing abundantly to the work of the Church, to missionaries, to benevolent outreach, and to taking the Gospel into all the world or will we spend most of it on ourselves in an attempt to meet worldly standards of excellence? The eternal choice is will we invest in treasures that are nice for now but worthless in eternity or will we increase our heavenly treasures by increasing our giving to fund the work of Christ and His Church?

If your time on earth ended today, how would your heavenly account compare to your earthly one? How much heavenly treasure have you laid up for eternity? Start today to build a portfolio that will last for eternity. While you can't take it with you, you can send it on ahead (voted best investment plan for all times by the Lord Himself).